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ABSTRACT

Intended for special education teachers, the idea book for involving parents in the individualized education program process is presented. Barriers interferring with parent participation and suggestions for overcoming them are addressed in nine areas: communication problems, transportation problems, babysitting problems, lack of time, lack of understanding of the system, feelings of inferiority, feeling that problems won't be resolved, language and/or cultural differences, and realistically accepting their child's disability. Among the suggestions offered are being available to parents, keeping parents informed of their child's progress, providing babysitting, building parents' confidence, and being supportive and sensitive to parents' feelings. (SB)

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BUT I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING!

A Special Educator's Guide to Working with Parents

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BUT I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING!

INTRODUCTION

All of the current books, articles, and magazines designed for special education teachers discuss home-school partnerships, the parent-teacher team, or working with parents. Each emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in the child's educational program. Public Law 94-142 (The Education of All Handicapped Children's Act) underscores the importance of involvement by including parents as full participants in the I.E.P. (Individualized Education Program) process; and all educators know that they are able to accomplish much more when the students' parents view education as a priority and lend their support. Everyone agrees that parental participation is a good idea, but few teachers and fewer school systems have found ways of making it work. In too many instances, teachers outnumber parents at school meetings; calls and notes home are unacknowledged; and I.E.P. meetings are unattended. If it's such a great idea, why doesn't it work?

ASKING THE PARENTS

This idea book is based on a study of over 100 families with students receiving special education services in a large, culturally diverse metropolitan school district. Families were asked to describe the barriers that they face when trying to participate in their child's educational program and to suggest what could be done to overcome those barriers. Although all socioeconomic groups were included, the majority of the families were lower income with many receiving some form of public assistance. Families of children receiving the full range of special education services from nearly full-day integration into the regular classroom to self-contained, segregated classrooms and schools participated in the study. All of the categorical areas except gifted were included in the randomly selected sample as were all student age categories from preschool through 21. Each of the families was contacted by a Special Education Parent Facilitator, a specially trained parent of a handicapped child in special education. The Special Education Parent Facilitator explained the study and asked if she could arrange to come to their home for an interview. A structured interview which took from 45 minutes to an hour was conducted in the family's preferred language. Parents consistently identified nine barriers that interfere with their participation in their child's special education program. The remainder of this guidebook is organized around those barriers and the recommendations that parents and others made for overcoming them. In general, the ideas are easy to implement. Most do not require extra money and, once implemented, take little time to maintain. Although this study was conducted with parents of students receiving special education services, many of the barriers that they face are faced by all parents; and many of the recommendations they made could be used by all teachers.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This idea book may be used in several ways to assist you in working with parents. We suggest the following.

- If you are looking for ways of helping parents get involved, read through each of the sections. Many of the ideas can be adapted to different problems.

- If you feel that one of the barriers that we have described is a problem for many of the parents of your students check to see if you have tried all of the suggestions listed.

- If you want to be sure that you have tried everything, use the ideas as a checklist. What have you tried? What would you be willing to try again?

- If you have volunteers in your classroom, find the ideas that take some extra time and let a volunteer help develop them.

- If your whole program or school is having trouble getting parents to participate, take this book to the next faculty meeting and look for one idea that the school might focus on to help solve the problem.

- If you are already working with parents, have them read the book and add their ideas to it.

- If you don't find anything in this book that you haven't tried, pat yourself on the back and share your copy and your expertise with someone else!

THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED

Parents identified nine barriers that they feel they confront when they try to participate in their child's special education program. Those barriers are listed below. In the pages that follow, a further explanation of each of the barriers is provided along with some practical ideas for overcoming each one.

Communication Problems

Transportation Problems

Babysitting Problems

Lack of Time

Lack of Understanding of the System

Feelings of Inferiority

Feeling That Problems Won't Be Resolved

Language and/or Cultural Differences

Realistically Accepting Their Child's Disability

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Over 100 definitions of communication exist. That fact alone illustrates how difficult it is for two or more people to "get on the same wavelength." All communication is complex. It is affected by what is being said, how it is being said, who is saying it, and who is hearing it or reading it. The time of day, the room arrangement, how each person is feeling, and the physical stances that each assumes influence how messages are given and received. It isn't easy but it's still the best way we have of working things out together. The Resource Section of this book provides many resources for teachers that deal with improving communication between home and school, but there are several general rules about communicating with parents that can be stated here. Although most educational axioms are stated positively, these are not. These are the "Never, Evers" of teacher to parent communication.

- Never, ever let your first contact be negative.
- Never, ever talk down to parents. They're adults, too.
- Never, ever speak in jargon or alphabet soup.
- Never, ever assume that your training and experience has given you more knowledge about a particular child than his or her parents have.
- Never, ever forget that each culture has its own traditions, values, and beliefs, and they may not be the same as yours.

- Never, ever forget that both you and the family are working for the same person--the child.

- Never, ever forget that parents do care about their children. Sometimes they just don't express it the way we think they should.

- Never, ever forget that parents deserve respect, courtesy, and understanding--just like teachers.

In our conversations with parents, we discovered that one of the greatest barriers that they faced related to the way schools were communicating with them--or not communicating. They felt unwelcome, devalued, and discredited. In the special education classroom teachers take such care to see that this doesn't happen to children, but perhaps there needs to be at least as much concern for the parents. Here are some ideas to help make that happen.

MAKING YOURSELF ACCESSIBLE, AVAILABLE, AND A REAL PERSON TO PARENTS

- Send home a note at the beginning of each school year saying that you're "Amy's" teacher. A ditto is OK, but a handwritten note of one or two lines on stationery is more personal. Better yet, as an art project, have the children make the cards for you to write on.

- Give parents the phone number of the school and a list of times when you can talk at school. Also, remind them that it is OK to call the school and leave a message requesting that you call them back. You might want to do this in a note then follow it up with a call at that time to let them know you really are there. (Some teachers share their home phones with their students' parents. That's a nice idea but something that you may not choose to do.)

- Even if you don't share your home telephone number, make some contacts with parents on your own time. Let them know that their child is important enough to you that you took time out of your evening or weekend to get in touch.

- Be sure to initiate contact with every parent as soon as possible. If they don't have a phone, use the mail. This way, you can assure that your first contact is positive.

- Get in touch with good news. Develop a personal schedule of contacts so that every parent hears something nice each month.

- Try the "back-and-forth notebook" that so many teachers of young and/or severely handicapped students use. The child carries it from home to school and back allowing teacher and family to make notes.

- Keep the contacts personal--cute stationery, postcards, child-made notes, handwritten, mailed. Everyone likes to feel that they're special.

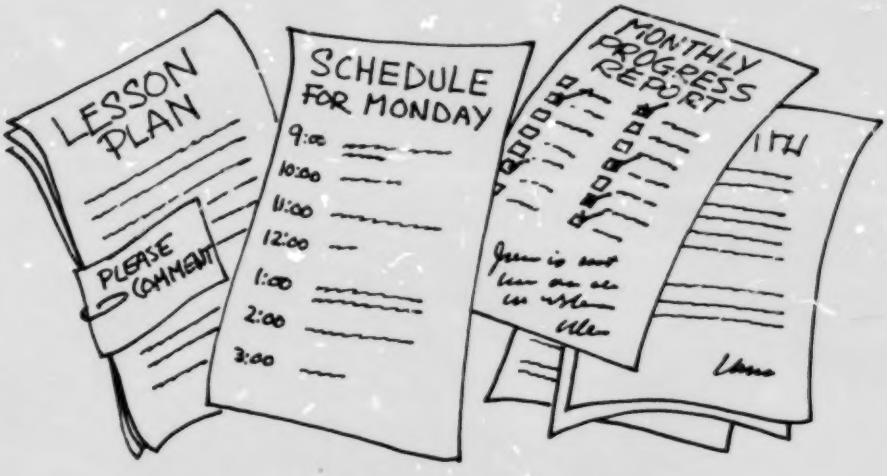
- Be sure that the message is given in the family's preferred language. It's not good news when you can't understand it.

- When you're communicating about a problem, be straightforward, and non-judgmental. Ask for help, or tell how you're handling it openly. Call when you're not angry and always make a second contact to let parents know how it is going.

KEEPING PARENTS INFORMED ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S PROGRESS

- The interdisciplinary team should be more than a series of initials on an I.E.P. form. Parents deserve to know their names, who they are, and what they do. Those team members also have a responsibility to contact parents themselves or through the teacher.

- Send home a short lesson plan in one area--what skill you're teaching, why you've chosen it, and how you're teaching it. Ask parents to comment on it, offer suggestions, and come to watch the instruction.



- Send home the schedule for a typical day so parents can see the wide range of activities that go on.

- Send home a monthly progress report, an attention-getting ditto with areas of progress checked and a one-line comment from you.

CONFERENCING

- Set a relaxed tone. Have a conversation before you drag out all the papers and forms. Find out what the parents are excited or concerned about. Have something to munch on--a popcorn popper going in a corner of the room, apple juice, coffee. At school, you are the host or hostess and it's important to help parents get as comfortable there as you would in your own home.

- Sometimes ask if it would be more convenient if you went to their house for the conference. For some parents your willingness to meet them on their own turf means a lot.

- Ask parents what they want to be called. Some prefer to be addressed in a more formal way; others prefer a more casual approach. But always ask; don't assume you can guess their preference.

- Try a new approach to conferencing. Invite all the parents in for a potluck or a meal their children have cooked. Food is a nice way to break down barriers. Spend a few minutes with each family to let them know you're glad they came.

- Ask parents for their ideas on specific issues. Then use those ideas. For example, how can we get more parents to get involved; how often do you want to hear from the school?

IN GENERAL

- Review your communications with parents. Find your strengths and weaknesses and work on both.

- Recognize that you and the child's parents won't always be in agreement, and get comfortable with that. Just try to understand why the difference exists.

- Finally, approach parents in the same way that you approach any other adult that you want to do well with.

The ideas presented above were all suggested by parents of students receiving special education services. You may want to add to the list or ask the teachers and parents you work with to add more.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS

Whether you work in a rural area where families and schools are miles apart or in a city, transportation is a major problem. Many families don't have cars; many others don't have cars they can count on; and public transportation is inadequate or unsafe. If these problems sound familiar, consider some of the ideas parents we talked to suggested.

BRINGING PARENTS IN

- Form a transportation tree. Like a phone tree, each person is responsible for getting two or three other people to attend. (Get parental permission to give out addresses and phone numbers.)

- Have a classroom or school-wide fund raising activity to rent a van or school bus several times during the year. The van can go directly to parents' homes or make stops at shopping centers, grocery stores, or community centers that families frequent.

- Talk to school administrators about grant money available to pay cab fare, bus fare, babysitting. It has been done in more than one district to get parents involved.

- Just once try a teacher co-op. Offer to pick up parents on your way to the meeting.

REACHING OUT TO PARENTS

- Vary the meeting place. If children in your classroom come from other parts of the city, consider holding the meeting at a neighborhood school, community center, or church which is closer.

- Link up with your local public television station, and use it as a way of getting information out. Have call-ins about various special education programs, go through a mock I.E.P. meeting, demonstrate teaching strategies. This is not just a futuristic idea. Many public stations have airtime that must be devoted to public service, and they just don't have enough programs. And remember, you can broadcast the same program in a variety of languages.

- Get acquainted with ministers, welfare workers, and others who play a significant role in your students' lives. Provide them with general information about the school and its programs. Many parents that you never see at school are at church all day Sunday and on Wednesday night.

Some of these ideas require a real willingness on your part to take that extra step to include families. Your job is difficult, and you have your own lives and priorities to manage. But sometimes it really pays to go more than halfway to let parents know you think that they and their children are worth it.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

BABYSITTING PROBLEMS

Finding babysitters poses problems for all families, but the difficulty is increased when you're looking for a sitter for a handicapped child or when you have limited resources. The parents that we talked with suggested these no-cost ideas for solving the babysitting problem.

PROVIDING BABYSITTING

- Contact high school Home Management teachers or service club advisors (Future Teachers of America) and arrange to have their students babysit during meetings.

- Contact faculty in teacher education, child development, nursing, recreation, counseling, and psychology at a nearby community college or university and arrange for faculty to send students as part of assignments.

- Use school money to hire licensed child care workers to babysit at school.

- For general, school-wide meetings, have teachers watch the children while parents meet.

- Ask for parent volunteers to take turns watching the children during the meeting or conference.

- Check with the local Senior Center for volunteers that may be willing to come to the school to babysit.

- Plan some meetings where parents and children don't have to be separated--potlucks, fairs, skits, or athletic events.

Schools were designed to be places for children to learn. All of the materials can be used after hours as well. It only takes two or three adults to supervise while parents meet or conference.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

LACK OF TIME

Lack of time is probably the most difficult problem of all. Another way of saying that we don't have time is saying that it's not a priority. No matter how busy we are, we usually find time to do those things that are really important to us. In some instances our job with busy parents may be to encourage them to make their child's educational program a higher priority. With others, our job may be to recognize that the child's program has to be a low priority at this time and to be non-judgmental in our interactions with them.

FINDING TIME

- Call parents regularly with news about their child to let them know he/she is important to you.

- Acknowledge how busy their life is but request a short meeting at their house, at school, or at another mutually convenient place. When you get together, make it a positive meeting; reinforce the parent for being there.

- Offer to drive the youngsters home one day so that you can stay and talk. (Check with your insurance company and supervisor first about personal liability.)

- Request a substitute for your class or have another teacher cover it one day so that you can visit parents at home or meet them where they work at lunch or during their break.

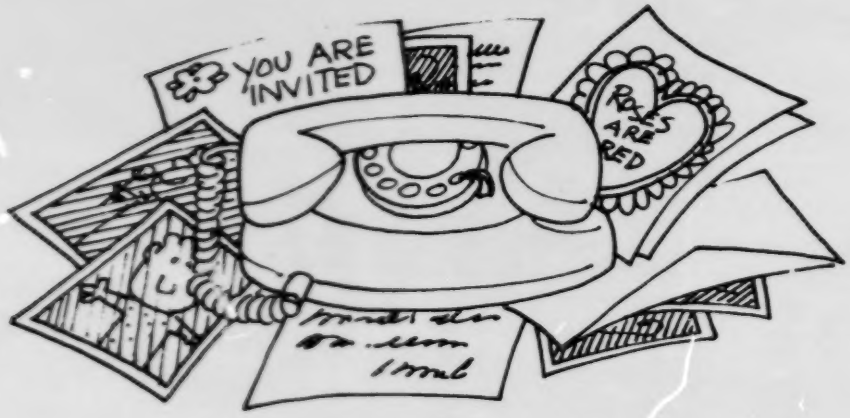
- Have a special function that parents will want to attend--a fiesta at the park, a show, a carnival.

- Have children participate in inviting their parents. Some may design and write the entire card. Others may glue a picture on, but every child can do something.

BEING NON-JUDGMENTAL

- Let parents know that you understand why they can't participate; assure them that none of us can do everything all of the time, and make it clear that you'll be available if their circumstances change.

- Continue to send notes home reporting good things. Include a snapshot now and then so parents can see their child at school.



- Call periodically just to see how <u>they're</u> doing.

Most of us have times in our lives when we feel like the circus performer who spins a long line of plates. Just as he has the last one spinning, the one at the beginning is teetering out of balance and needs his attention again. Parents of handicapped children are no different. They, too, have times when there are more critical concerns than the child's educational program. Don't add another problem by being critical of their withdrawal from school.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE SYSTEM

Have you ever gotten a letter from the IRS or been through a tax audit?

How do you feel when you go to your doctor's office? Have you ever had to wait, ever felt you were taking too much of his/her time, ever not understood what was being said but felt embarrassed to ask questions? Have you ever taken a class where you felt everybody else knew what was going on and you didn't? If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you have had a glimpse of what many parents feel when they have to face THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

It's not easy to walk into an I.E.P. meeting and face four to six professionals who are speaking in alphabet soup--I.E.P., O.T., P.T., Sp. Lang. Ther., D.I.S., R.S.P., L.D., L.H., T.M.R., V.H., P.O.H.I., etc. It's especially difficult when their alphabet soup isn't even in your primary language. No one can fully participate until they understand the system and know where to begin.

HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

- Offer explanations to parents about your classroom and program. Tell them what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how you do it.

- Videotape different parts of a typical day to show parents what goes on.

- Develop a library of books, handouts, tapes, and brochures that explain handicapping conditions, various programs, and teaching techniques that you can share with parents.

- Acquaint parents with the administrative structure of the program--the chain of command.

HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM AT THE SYSTEM LEVEL

- Develop a handbook by parents for parents.

- Provide printed, audio, and videotape information about the range of services and programs in the district. Have the tapes available at neighborhood schools and public libraries for easy access. Air the videotapes on public television several times a year with a call-in session following the tape.

- Provide group tours and visitations of various classes, schools, and programs so that parents can see the range of services and programs within the district.

- Offer inservice training to parents about teaching techniques, management techniques, the I.E.P. process, effective communication and the law.

- Train a group of parents to be parent advocates, trainers, and support people. (See the Resource Section of this book for a description of Special Education Parent Facilitators.)

Taking away the mysteries of THE SYSTEM is one of the best ways to help parents participate. It recognizes parents as knowledgeable adults and demonstrates a commitment to providing quality services to their children. Many times when the district doesn't have the resources to resolve a problem well-informed parents on your side can make a difference.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

Regardless of the theoretical framework you work within or the terminology that you use, most special educators agree that they want their students to feel good about themselves. They may be working on self-concept, ego development, or shaping behavior; but they are all teaching children to be more competent and to have more control over their environment. It's easy to think about this in terms of the children we teach, but why do we forget that parents sometimes feel inferior, too? The suggestions made earlier in the communication section can help stamp out feelings of inferiority, but we've included some more specific ideas here that the parents we talked to suggested.

BUILDING PARENTS' CONFIDENCE

- Speak in everyday language, not in jargon or alphabet soup. If the parents' preferred language is different from your own, have an interpreter available; and look at the parent, not the interpreter.

- Get rid of the physical barriers that add power to your position--the desk, your briefcase, your professional calendar. Sit on the same level. If there's only one big chair, don't sit in it!

- Remember how much is communicated by expression, tone of voice, and body position. Try to make parents feel comfortable through body language as well as words. If you are working with families from diverse cultures, remember that touching,

physical proximity, expressions, and gestures are all culture-bound.

- Allow enough time for parents to talk with you. If you have a time limit, state it at the beginning of the conference or call. There's something awfully degrading about someone constantly checking their watch as they talk to you!

- Don't feel that a conference has failed if you never get to present your information. If a parent talks the entire time, he/she probably needed it and will come back to hear what you have to say.

- Give parents positive strokes. Give them credit for all of the things they've accomplished at home. Ask what has worked for them and incorporate it into the school program.

- Be the host/hostess when parents come to school for I.E.P. meetings. Meet them before the group convenes, take them to the meeting, and be sure that they're introduced.

- Remember that parents were students not so long ago and that teachers and schools may bring back forgotten feelings of failure or inferiority.

- Encourage parents to talk about or bring in examples of school-related activities that are done at home.

- Let parents know that it's OK to bring a friend along--an advocate, a neighbor, a "significant other." Sometimes there's safety in numbers.

- Give parents opportunities to use their strengths in class--to talk about their job and the skills they must have to do it, to cook a special dish, play an instrument, plan a party, or teach about their language and culture. Then acknowledge their contribution with a letter from the class and a special certificate from the school.

Teachers and other school professionals have a lot of training and a lot of experience. We have learned to be "experts" about a wide range of children. Through the discipline of psychology we are good predictors of behavior of all children but sometimes poor predictors of what a single child will do in any particular situation. Parents have the opposite skill. Although they may not be able to speak for a wide range of children, they know what their own child will do in many circumstances. They <u>are</u> the professionals for their own child, and should be made to feel that they are.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

FEELING THAT PROBLEMS WON'T BE RESOLVED

Conflict is inevitable. It occurs in all groups and all relationships. Often it is healthy and causes us to review our own position in the face of new information. Sometimes it is bitter and makes us want to cling to our position "just to show them they're wrong." But in all groups, well-managed conflicts result in improved decision-making. In parent-teacher relationships conflict may be caused by disagreement about information or its interpretation, by difficulty in making decisions, or by interpersonal problems. Perhaps the best way to approach conflict is to recognize that it is not bad and to try to become less defensive when conflicts arise.

None of us likes to lose hope in a situation. In order to keep going we have to feel that we are being listened to and that we are making progress. Attending one more faculty meeting where the same old issue is hashed, rehashed, then tabled without resolution is discouraging. The same is true for parents. Remember, they are facing a lifetime of extra decisions and problems because of their handicapped child. It's frustrating when it seems that none of the problems are getting resolved.

The ideas below suggest strategies for managing conflict and resolving problems.

MANAGING CONFLICT

- Start working on the conflict when you first feel it. If you feel defensive, anxious, negative or overly concerned when you think about meeting with a parent, it probably means you anticipate conflict. Try to figure out what exactly is bothering you and work on it.

- Remember, if you feel anxious and defensive, parents may, too. Sometimes lack of participation is really just anticipation of a conflict. We all tend to avoid situations that make us uncomfortable.

- It's OK many times to let parents know that you have concerns about the meeting, that you've been thinking about it, and want it to go well.

- Good management of conflict is far more important than being right. Look for areas of agreement and work from there. Almost everyone will agree that the child's needs are most important and that there must be more than one way to meet those needs.

- Brainstorm alternatives. If people get stuck on two conflicting points of view, suggest that each faction must come up with at least two other suggestions.

- When conflicts are interpersonal or informational, it often helps to address the reasons for disagreement rather than the disagreement itself. For example, procedural comments such as the following can re-focus the group.
  "Let's review what has been said up to now and how we got where we are." "What other information do we need?" "Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Garcia seem to disagree on this matter. What do some of the rest of you think?"

- Sometimes appealing to the personal goodwill of the group is helpful. "We're all here to develop the best possible program for Mary. Among us we have many good ideas; let's try to work as a group to put those ideas into a program we can deliver."

SOLVING PROBLEMS

- Most things are negotiable. Start with that premise when you are working with parents.

- Provide at least two alternatives for every suggestion. ("We can try this method or that method. These are the strengths and weaknesses in each. What do you think?" "We can place in this program or that program. These are the advantages and disadvantages of each. Why don't you look at both and see what you think?")

- Teachers don't have to know all the answers. Tell parents what you think, what you believe, and what you know. Tell them when you don't know, too.

- Keep bringing the focus back to the child's needs - not their needs, your needs, or the system's needs.

- Base program and placement conferences on data, so that the child's progress or lack of progress is evident. When you are expressing feelings or opinions identify them as such. This model makes decision-making much easier.

- Try to end every conference/meeting/phone call with a clear understanding of "next steps." What is going to be done, when it is going to be done, who is going to do it, and how you'll know when it has been accomplished. When practical put the understandings reached in writing and give those involved a copy.

Few people look forward to conflicts, but they are an inevitable part of human interactions especially when people on both sides of the issue are personally invested in the outcome. Even though teachers want to be good teachers and parents want the best for their children, it is sometimes difficult to find a common strategy for achieving the goal. Some conflicts can be prevented by resolving small problems; others can be managed in ways that do not create winners and losers.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Our schools have long been charged with passing down the historical and cultural traditions of the country, but only recently have we recognized that the country and its people do not share a single, common cultural tradition. Each group of people in the United States has a unique heritage that enriches all others. In a culturally pluralistic society, cultural differences are taught, celebrated, learned from, and respected. Although languages are important to maintaining cultural values and traditions, you don't have to be bilingual to provide multicultural education and experience. The parents we talked to were from many diverse cultures. These are some of the suggestions they had for overcoming language and cultural barriers.

OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- If you are not bilingual, have someone available who is when you talk to parents. Better yet, encourage them to bring a bilingual friend or relative. Make an attempt to learn words, phrases, and to say something positive about the child in the family's preferred language.

- Be sure that printed materials for parents are available in their preferred language.

- Provide a sign language interpreter for parents who are deaf or hard of hearing.

OVERCOMING CULTURAL BARRIERS

- Learn as much as you can about the cultures that your students represent through talking with the parents and other staff, reading books, attending inservice sessions, and viewing films. Family structures, values, and child-rearing practices vary greatly. You can then use the cultural differences as strengths rather than working at cross-purposes.

- Instead of lumping all groups together, recognize the many differences that exist within groups of Hispanics, Anglos, Blacks, Pan-Asians. Each country, each region, and most important, each individual has unique ways of interpreting their cultural experience.

- Weed out the stereotypes and prejudices that have been acquired through your own cultural roots. Try to approach people individually and openly.

- Use cultural differences to bring schools and families together. Utilize celebrations and the special traditions that go with them as ways of learning and working together.

- Never feel that you have to apologize for your own culture or ethnicity. We all have something special to contribute.

Cultural diversity opens the doors for new learnings, new experiences, and new ways of solving problems. Viewing people of different cultures, races, and ethnic groups as people with strengths to share rather than as people with deficits to overcome can go a long way toward overcoming language and cultural barriers.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

REALISTICALLY ACCEPTING THEIR CHILD'S DISABILITY

It's easy to say that parents haven't faced the fact that they have a handicapped child or to blame them for not being more realistic. It's much more difficult to describe what "realistic acceptance" is or how we know when a parent has achieved it. Much of what we know about the grief cycle in death and dying has been applied to families who have handicapped children - the sense of loss, guilt, outrage, anger, and eventual working through of the change in expectations that the birth of a disabled child brings to the family. Like all other processes, families do not go through this one at the same rate nor are any of the issues resolved forever. Knowing about the grief cycle and the times in the child's and parents' lives when the crisis may arise can be helpful as we work with families.

HELPING PARENTS

- Be supportive, caring, competent, sensitive, and kind; but never assume that you know what they're going through unless you also have a handicapped child.

- Find parents who are willing to talk to other parents in your class. Parent-to-parent communication works best.

- Keep a list of resources handy. (You may even want to send it to parents during the year.) The community resources

might include information on support groups, respite care, recreational programs, medical and dental services, and financial assistance.

- Keep a library of lists, books, pamphlets, audio and videotapes available for parents. If you sense a concern in an area, pick something and send it home with a note saying you thought this resource might be helpful.

- Be aware of the grief cycle and extra life crises that parents of handicapped children are likely to face.

- Remember that parents of handicapped children must take time out, too. The handicapped child is only one member of the family, and sometimes that child is not the priority.

Parenting isn't easy, especially if your child is handicapped. As teachers we can provide support, teaching competence, and a resource for linking parents to other parents. We can help by being nonjudgmental and recognizing that what we think is best for the child may not be best for the family.

OTHER IDEAS!

NOTES ON WHAT I'VE TRIED AND HOW IT WORKED

SUMMARY

Anyone who thinks teaching is easy has never been a teacher! Each year the demands increase. It's no longer just you and the students but you and the paperwork, the accountability, the changing rules and regulations, the pending litigation, and the inservice. It's more time, more meetings, and many times less satisfaction. It is no wonder that when you think of parent participation it sometimes sounds like one more demand to juggle. And yet, parent-teacher teaming is something special. Both teachers and parents are committed to and responsible for the child's progress. Teachers and families together shoulder the responsibility for helping handicapped children learn to master their environments. No other agency or group of people have that same investment. It's easy to feel that sometimes you're doing it alone or that you've tried everything. But remember, as long as there are still parents who aren't participating in their child's educational program, we haven't tried everything yet.

RESOURCES

SELECTED BOOKS

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Heward, William L., Dardig, Jill C., and Rossett, Allison. Working With Parents of Handicapped Children. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1979.

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Swick, Kevin J., Hobson, Carol F., and Duff, R. Eleanor. Building Successful Parent-Teacher Partnerships. Atlanta: Humanics Limited, 1979.

Turnbull, Ann P. and Turnbull, H. Rutherford. Parents Speak Out. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1978.

Wilson, Gary B. Parents and Teachers. Atlanta: Humanics Press, 1974.

AUDIO CASSETTES

Aragon, Juan and Sierra, Viola. "Cultural Diversity in Education: Teaching Spanish Speaking Children." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Aragon, Juan and Marquez, Leon. "Spanish Americans--Language and Culture." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Hillard, Asa and Smallwood, Gloria. "Educational Perspectives: Teaching Black Children." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Kitano, Harry. "Asian Americans: Cultural Contrasts." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Locke, Patricia, Kito, John, and Lowe, Bertha. "Indian Gifts of Culture and Diversity." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Pepper, Floy and Sando, Joe. "A Conflict of Values: Teaching Indian Children." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Sata, Lindberg and Fuchigami, Robert. "Barriers to Learning: Teaching Asian American Children." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 60 min. cassette.

Smallwood, Gloria and Taylor, Orlando. "Black Language--Black Culture." Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, Virginia. 90 min. cassette.

MULTIMEDIA KITS

Bennett, Leatha Mae and Henson, Ferris O. Keeping in Touch With Parents: The Teacher's Best Friend. Austin, Texas: Learning Concepts, 1977.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE

The Special Education Parent Facilitator Project is a part of the San Diego Unified School Districts. Selected parents of students receiving special education services are trained in areas such as the I.E.P. process, advocacy, supportive techniques, assertiveness, due process, programs and services. They work with other parents of special education students, teachers, and administrators to assist in providing the best services for handicapped children. Special Education Parent Facilitators are paid for their time, and have demonstrated that participating parents do make a difference.